

USEPA Region 5 Supplemental Wetlands Grants Information FY 2003

For States, Tribes and Local Units of Government in
Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin

September, 2002

REGIONAL DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS is 12/20/02, see page 3.

Note: This Information supplements, but does not substitute for the National Guidelines.

☛ How do I get the full National grants guidelines for the Wetlands Protection Development Grants?

⊗ See the Internet at <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/wetlands/initiative/#financial>, or call EPA's Wetlands Helpline at 800/832-7828. The Guidelines were also published in the August 26, 2002, Federal Register at pp. 54810-54815.

☛ What's a "Local Unit of Government" for this grant program?

⊗ Eligible local government entities include, but are not limited to, city, county and regional government agencies; flood control districts; water management districts, park districts and regional planning commissions. Check the National grants guidelines for more information.

☛ What's in a Proposal that goes to Region 5?

⊗ We do *not* need grant application forms at this first stage and there are no set length limits. *This may contrast with the National grants guidelines.* These are competitive grants, so good, clear explanations of what you plan to do are very important.

⊗ It is a serious grant proposal for the work you want to do, its schedule and budget. A good way to approach this is to write a draft work plan for the grant. Think the project through thoroughly. Explain what you want to do, why, who and how you will do it. What will the budget be and what does each category cover? Carefully double-check the arithmetic and grant match for your budget. What is your general schedule and key interim project milestones? Clearly identify the final goal or desired outcome of the project, along with specific products for the grant, including twice-yearly progress reports.

⊗ Where are you coming from and where are you going with your project? Why do you need to do your project? What steps have been taken in the past on this or similar issues? What old or new methods will you be using to get your grant work done? What will be your grant's specific products and how will they be used? What will be the anticipated gain in wetlands protection? How does it relate to larger water or wetland issues? How will it contribute to your wetlands protection program? How will it make a difference? What travel do you need to do for the grant tasks and for learning more about that subject matter and sharing your information with others?

⊗ Please explain the concrete support you have from within your organization and any partner organizations, both for doing the grant work and using the final products. How will this effort be implemented and sustained, or be used and useful, beyond the grant period? How does this project fit with ongoing efforts in your area?

⊗ Proposals for developing ordinances or major wetland plans should include a letter of support from the head of your Agency or from the Tribal Chairman.

⊗ Remember that grant proposals are reviewed and scored by a committee, with some reviewers unfamiliar with your geography, wetlands/water issues, partnerships or past work, so it helps to explain your situation well.

🍃 What do I need to include in the wetlands grant proposal?

⊗ The work plan including descriptions of project tasks, schedule, grant budget and products coming from the grant. This will also include a summary of key objectives and final products, performance evaluation process and reporting schedule, roles and responsibilities of the recipient and EPA in carrying out the work plan commitments and contact information for your Program Manager and Grant Project Lead Manager. We also need a cover letter from your organization, signed at a level sufficient to make the commitment to potentially spend money and work time on the grant. Include key letters of support from other working partners only when directly applicable.

🍃 How can I prepare a schedule?

⊗ Estimate activities by quarter or by month from the start of the grant. In month five, you will be planning to do B, C, D and continue work on A, for example. Qualify if some work is seasonal or tied to a specific date, like conducting wetland aquatic insect sampling or hosting a special event.

⊗ If you are planning to hire staff to work on the grant, or engage a contractor, be realistic about your organization's hiring or contractual process and the time it actually takes to get extra help on board. It is not unusual for grants to be essentially dormant at their start because of this lead time; you just need to plan it into your schedule.

⊗ Include submitting progress reports to Region 5. Depending on the particular grant we will require progress reports either every quarter or every six months.

⊗ One approach to a good progress report is to include a project overview and overall progress to date; a narrative assessment of accomplishments in the last reporting period and how they relate to the grant's work plan; a discussion of any deficiencies and corrective actions taken; a note on any special attention required from EPA; a narrative on planned activities for the next reporting period.

☛ What budget categories should I use?

- ⊗ These typically correspond to the SF 5700 Grant Application form: Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Travel, Equipment (as defined by your organization's accounting system), Supplies, Contractual, Construction, Other (what is included in "other"?), and Indirect Costs. Please include a narrative to explain what is included or approximated in each budget category, such as number of work hours for what kind of employee or number and anticipated destination of trips for what purposes under travel.
- ⊗ Your organization's own budget system categories may be used for the proposal stage, as long as they are clear.
- ⊗ Budgets must include ***all*** items in the total project costs, *not just those for the Federal share*.

☛ Is it helpful to break out and itemize large dollar project proposals?

If you have multiple project ideas, each of which can reach a useful, independent end point with its own products, it helps to break out a description and a budget for each major piece. If you have worthy ideas, but we have limited money, it may be possible for one or more of the pieces to proceed as a grant.

☛ How does the grant match work?

For these grants the match is 25 per cent of the total project costs. If your total project will cost \$40,000, then the Federal share would be at most \$30,000 and the local share would be at least \$10,000. It is possible for the local share to be higher, as an "overmatch." The local share may be "in kind," such as with work hours from paid employees. These matches are for the total costs of the project, and do not have to be met within each individual budget category. The local share (other than Tribal Section 638 funds under the Indian Self Determination and Education Act) may not be provided by other Federal funding sources.

☛ How much grant funding is available?

- ⊗ In recent years, it has been about \$1.5 million in Region 5.
- ⊗ We fund grant proposals in a wide dollar range per project. In FY 2001 awards ranged from \$38,099 to \$379,309 (the larger grants included several projects).

☛ When do I need to get the proposals to EPA Region 5?

- ⊗ No later than **Friday, December 20, 2002**.
- ⊗ Please send them to:

Cathy Garra
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5
Water Division, WW-16J
77 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604

- ⊗ A fax, *followed by a signed copy in the mail*, is acceptable. Our fax number is 312/886-7804; an alternate fax is 312/886-0957.

🍃 How are grant proposals evaluated?

- ⊗ All timely proposals are reviewed by a committee and competitively scored.
- ⊗ Specific grant evaluation criteria for Region 5 will be available on the Region 5 web site at www.epa.gov/r5water/wshednps or by calling 312/886-0241.

🍃 Are there any special priorities for these grants?

- ⊗ National priorities include 1) developing a comprehensive monitoring and assessment program for wetlands; 2) improving the effectiveness of compensatory mitigation; 3) refining the protection of vulnerable wetlands and aquatic resources. (Please note that this year's national Grants Guidelines expands its discussion of these priorities.)
- ⊗ More detailed Region 5 priorities are outlined in our evaluation criteria. They include projects complementing a wetlands plan/wetlands planning area and elements of other solid wetlands program areas, including geographic/local wetlands protection, bioassessment, innovative wetlands training, cross programmatic wetlands and water programs work, water quality standards for wetlands and the systematic strengthening of wetlands protection, as outlined in the Core Elements.
- ⊗ *Selecting a priority topic, without a clear plan for achieving environmental results, is not an effective proposal.*

🍃 What is the anticipated time frame for the wetland grant process in Region 5?

- ⊗ Receipt of proposals–December 20, 2002
- ⊗ Notification to you that project is in or out of our funding range–late March, 2003
- ⊗ Grant application forms and full work plan due–late spring, 2003
- ⊗ Grant award date–September, 2003; sometimes earlier.

🍃 How does the grant application work?

- ⊗ If your project is selected for funding, we will notify you and ask you to submit a full, formal grant application, including all associated forms and assurances and a draft Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), if applicable (see QAPP section, below).
- ⊗ You may revise/update your proposal's work plan for the full application. The Federal share of the grant will remain the same as your original proposal, unless we tell you otherwise.
- ⊗ It is very important to submit your full grant application on time, to assist our grants staff during the busy summer processing season.

🍃 What kind of grant will be awarded?

Wetlands grants are project grants rather than program grants. If a grantee has several wetlands grant projects awarded in that fiscal year, they are combined into one grant. States with Performance Partnership Grants have the option of having the approved wetlands grant folded into their Performance Partnership Grant, if they desire. They still need to apply for and secure the wetland grant through the regular competitive process.

☛ When will the grant start and when can we start work?

⊗ FY 2003 Grants will be awarded on or before September 30, 2003. This means that a “safe” (and the usual) project and budget periods start date is October 1, 2003.

Sometimes a grant can be awarded earlier in August or September, allowing an earlier start date. You *cannot* be paid for work that occurs before the start of the project period of the grant. You may choose a start date later than October 1 if that meets your needs.

⊗ A typical wetland grant lasts two years, such as October 1, 2003-September 30, 2005. Project and budget periods can be shorter, but it is always possible to finish a grant early. We prefer to have a longer grant project period (up to the two years) rather than have to process a grant extension on a shorter grant that runs out of time.

☛ What are some common problem areas in the grant proposals reviewed by Region 5?

Note: See Appendix A of the National Grants Guidelines for “Grant Restrictions.” Grants are to be used to develop new wetlands protection programs or to refine existing programs. Because of the funding sources these grants can only be used for the development and not the operational support of wetlands protection programs. A provision for highly accomplished wetlands programs meeting the Core Elements and having a Performance Partnership Grant is described at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands under “financial assistance.”

⊗ From our experience, these are common areas that can make a grant proposal ineligible or less likely to be funded:

- Request for purchase/lease of vehicles or other items definitively excluded in Appendix A. *We can't do it.*
- Establishing actual projects in a mitigation banking or in lieu fee compensation system.
- Wetland inventories without associated assessment, programmatic or protection actions.
- Confusion that a large-scale wetland inventory can also constitute a wetland delineation for the 404 permit program.
- Work is largely contracted out with minimal involvement of the grantee's organization.
- Projects extending beyond two years
- Building a nature trail or restoring a wetland without a substantial wetlands protection or watershed program context.
- Scientific studies not linked to a wetlands protection program.
- Training or outreach activities that do not specify a target audience and their need/willingness to cooperate.
- Proposals that overlap and duplicate work in your previous wetlands grants. Wetland grants are project grants, and need to achieve a set of useful, freestanding deliverables and results. Sometimes an additional phase or geographic extension or refinement may be considered, but not a continuation funding of work already agreed to be done.
- Not factoring in public or political participation or consensus building for activities that will need good process to succeed, such as a Wetland Conservation Plan or wetland ordinance adoption.

- Not explaining the relationship of the project to strengthening a wetlands protection program.

🍃 Part of the reason we need to do the grant is to have someone to plan out the project and methods in detail before the work gets done. How can we say exactly what we plan to do in the proposal or work plan stage, before we know these details?

Explain your path for getting there. Some projects can be well-defined up front, others will take more work. For example, you may be doing investigations at a known set of established sampling sites. Or, you may be doing investigations on sites that you will pick out as part of the grant work, based on a certain set of criteria. In that case, you would discuss what those criteria would be.

🍃 What about a QAPP?

- ⊗ A Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) is required for projects that involve environmental measurements, such as data collection or using data collected by others.
- ⊗ If it applies to your project, you will learn about it when you are notified that you are on our funding plan. We will provide copies of our Water Division Guidance for QAPPs and a helpful book on working out Data Quality Objectives, the starting point of thinking through a QAPP. We will also schedule a conference call to help you get off to a good start on the QAPP and provide some technical assistance.
- ⊗ If your Agency/Tribe has an approved Quality Management Plan, its procedures may provide a satisfactory alternate QAPP process or relevant portions may be referenced in your project-specific QAPP.
- ⊗ The QAPP must be developed at the grantee's expense (not part of the grant or credit toward the grant match) and approved by USEPA before its activities may begin.
- ⊗ Plan to submit the draft QAPP as part of the full grant application in the spring; at a minimum the Data Quality Objectives *must* be included as part of the grant application.
- ⊗ Technical review of the QAPP within EPA takes time, but our process has been streamlined.
- ⊗ Remember, you *cannot* start work covered by the QAPP or be reimbursed for its costs until the QAPP is approved. It is prudent to try to get the QAPP completed before the grant is awarded.

🍃 How can I get ideas on how similar projects have been done?

- ⊗ EPA has a new wetlands grants data base, at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands under "financial assistance." This is an extension of the old grants catalogs and is searchable by topic. For example, if you wanted to prepare a wetlands conservation plan, you could look up earlier efforts by other States and Tribes throughout the Nation. You can also check on past grant work done in a State or other geographic area.
- ⊗ The Wetland Helpline has a supply of certain paper grants catalogs; call 800/832-7828.

☛ What travel should I plan for in my grant proposal?

- ⊗ Anything appropriate and justified for your project, including training or meetings on your topic. Travel is a part of a serious commitment to program development. It can improve your own programs and give good ideas to others.
- ⊗ The annual fall EPA Region 5 State and Tribal Wetlands Grants Meeting, normally in October.
- ⊗ Relevant national meetings by EPA or national wetlands organizations.

☛ How competitive are these wetland grants?

- ⊗ Every year, demand exceeds the money available, usually several times over in Region 5. In FY 2002 demand was nearly three times the available funding.
- ⊗ All grant applications compete against each other; there is no geographic allocation.
- ⊗ A goal of 15 per cent of our Regional grant allocation is targeted for Tribes and local units of government; typically this level is exceeded in Region 5.

☛ What are other related sources of grant money to consider?

- ⊗ EPA's wetlands web site has been redesigned to be easier to use and contains a lot of additional information on grant sources, such as the Five Star Restoration Grants for small watersheds and wetlands, at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands, under financial assistance.
- ⊗ EPA's Environmental Education Grants are no longer being funded.
- ⊗ Section 319 Non-Point Source Grants are administered by the State water agencies. They may have potential for covering watershed, wetland restoration and educational projects. More money has been added to funding the 319 program in recent years. For more information contact your State water agency's 319 staff.
- ⊗ EPA Research and Development grants may occasionally overlap in some areas of interest, such as developing biocriteria.

☛ What official wording must I need to use to acknowledge the grant in our published materials?

Please include the EPA grant number on the back of the title page, or in another suitable location, such as the back of a brochure.

(Grantees--Please also remember to include this acknowledgment in the products of existing grants.)

☛ I still have questions. Please call Cathy Garra at 312/886-0241 or e-mail her at garra.catherine@epa.gov.

We look forward to reviewing a group of strong grant proposals!